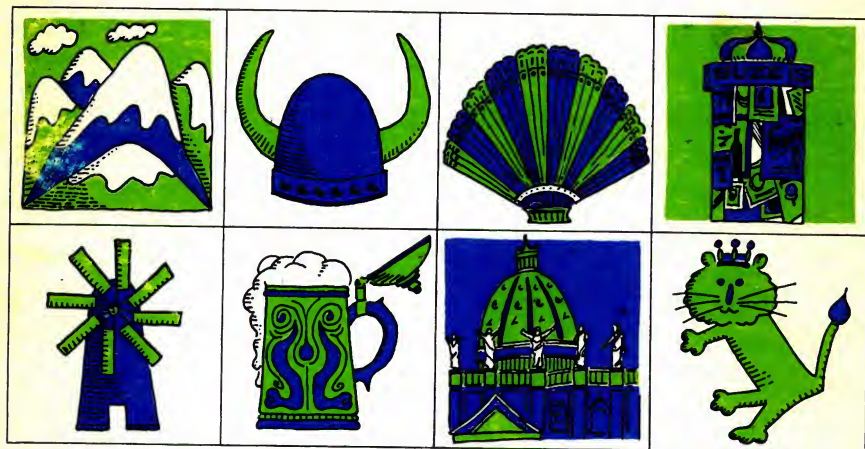


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# WITH THE PEACE CORPS IN THE PHILIPPINES

By Gerri Traina

When I was assigned to the Philippines by the Peace Corps, nobody could have been more ignorant about the Islands than I. The names Bataan, Leyte and Corregidor were familiar from World War II. I believed Manila was the capital (Quezon City is the official capital, although most government buildings are still in Manila). Beyond these few bits of information and misinformation, I was unusually vague, in today's jet age, about this republic of more than 30 million people.

English is the medium of instruction in the Philippines from the third grade, although Tagalog is the national language. However, educators felt that there was a need to introduce new methods of teaching English as a second language by teachers who were "native speakers" of English. Hence, their invitation to the Peace Corps. Being a "native speaker" was the only "ability" I brought to training—as an editor, publicist and copywriter, I had never set foot in a classroom as an instructor. Only a few in our initial group of fifty-five had had any practical teaching experience, yet we had been invited to this particular project. Included in the training and orientation program, however, were the theory and practice in the teaching of English, designed to meet the requirements of educational aides in elementary schools in the Philippines. Volunteers in our project were also requested to work in science and arithmetic instruction. Most elementary education volunteers, drawing on their own ingenuity and on whatever science background they possessed, could be expected to contribute to science education through improvised experiments and demonstrations, in schools where science had only recently been introduced into the curriculum.

During the 10-week training period at Penn State, we were evaluated with respect to technical ability and general personal suitability for the job for which we were supposedly best fitted, as well as for the project as a whole. Peace Corps selection is based on merit alone, without reference to race, religion or political affiliation. Two underlying factors guide the entire selection process. The candidate's personality characteristics must be such that he can make a successful adjustment to Peace Corps overseas standards, and, by the time he completes training, he must be able to satisfactorily perform the job assigned to him overseas. Medical selection standards are exceptionally high, but not inflexible.

On June 20, 1962, Peace Corps Group IV, Philippines departed from Seattle, Washington for Manila, where our training was to continue for several more weeks. At this time, language training was intensified and we were introduced to Bureau of Public Schools officials, our "sponsors" in the Philippines.

Finally, on July 29th, I arrived with my companion, Anabel Stafford, from Hobart, Indiana, at our destination:

Sitio Santa Lucia  
Barrio Canhaway  
Guindulman (town)  
Bohol (island province)  
The Visayas (area)  
The Philippines

## OUR NEW HOME

Canhaway is one of the fifteen *barrios* (villages which form the smallest political districts in the Philippines) of Guindulman. After the liberation, the barrio people built a school building for their children in the Santa Lucia section, 350 meters from the provincial road. It was called the Canhaway Elementary School. Over the years, additions were made to that building in order to handle grades one through



six. In 1963, that school won first prize in Schoolground Beautification for all of the Philippines.

Across from the Canhaway School is an open-frame wood construction with a nipa-palm roof. There is no electricity in this house, or running water. There is no flush toilet or kerosene stove.

It was to this house and to this school we were welcomed by Hugo Peligrino, principal, on July 29th, 1962.

## A NIPA HUT, OUR HOME

As we arrived at the house that was to be our home for the next twenty months, we found a legion of workers scrubbing down the walls, polishing the floors, sweeping the yard, cleaning the stove (clay burners which use firewood for fuel), feverishly preparing this not-new house for the two Americanos who were actually going to live in their place.

We found a two-story construction, partially held up by well-placed tree trunks. At the ground level, which, at one time, boasted a sari-sari store (a miniature general store), there was a storage area and, on the other side, another section with raised concrete, separated by G.I. sheeting. Eventually, a pipe was run in downstairs alongside the concrete, where we took our tomato can "showers."

Wooden stairs led to a small porch where shoes were left before entering the sala (living room). Two small bedrooms led off from the sala, with curtains draped in front of the entranceways as partitions. Originally a door and walls separated the sala from the dining area, but we took down the door and knocked over the planks in the walls to make library shelves for the books we had brought with us.

We stepped down into the dining area, which contained a large, round, captain's table and four straight-backed chairs. There was also an aparador (combination china closet and pantry). Towards the back of the house, past the stove and down two steps, was an area we devoted to washing-up and laundering hand linens. There were large water jars both here and at a "sink" in the cucina (kitchen).

Our windows, where we had them, resembled sliding shutters, with squares of a shell-like substance that served as panes. The nipa palm roof, which had to be replaced periodically, kept the house cool, but always seemed to be in need of repair, especially at the height of the rainy season.

### *Food and Cooking*

I weighed 128 pounds when I took my first Peace Corps medical exam. Two years later, I weighed 101 pounds. Before all weight-conscious females take off for the Philippines, I should warn them that most female PCV's gained weight (male PCV's usually lost). My team companion Anabel and I were two relatively rare exceptions.

Meat was a luxury. Unless we were having guests or dining elsewhere, we subsisted on fish, vegetables and rice. We occasionally bought chickens from neighbors who offered them for sale. Beef depended on its availability on Sunday, which was market day in Guindulman. Pork was reserved for special occasions.

Breakfast was "American"—fruit, rolls, eggs and coffee. We always had bananas. In season, we had mangoes, papayas, jackfruit, lanzones, starapples and other tropical fruit. Usually one egg each, fried or scrambled, bread from the town bakery and instant coffee completed the meal.

Between our Filipino dinner with rice and our American breakfast with bread, the noon meal was "mestizo," a little bit of both. Filipinos have dinner at noon, but we couldn't normally manage a big meal before the hottest time of day. There wasn't any fresh milk, so we drank warm soft drinks, warm beer and boiled water, which was refreshing if mixed with calamansi or lemonsita juice (citrus fruits).

### *Marketing*

We did most of our marketing in the poblacion (town), about a mile and a half away. Each town has an established market day one day of the week, when animals are slaughtered and seasonal fruits and vegetables are brought in from the

farms. After shopping at the open-air stalls for meat, fish, vegetables and spices, we'd search in amongst the stores for something new or different. Every once in a while, the town would run out of a certain commodity. . . . I wrote home in October of 1963: "The only exciting thing that happened this week was the return of facial tissues to Guindulman. We've been suffering for nearly two months without tissues since the stores in town ran out of stock. Every other day we've been washing out handkerchiefs, or using napkins or toilet tissue. Strange are the things that can become precious. . . ."

### SCHOOL LIFE: IN AND OUT OF THE CLASSROOM

Although we eventually became involved with other schools and other teachers, Anabel and I were originally assigned to two barrio elementary schools, the Canhaway School across the road from our house and the Guinacot School, about two miles along the provincial road away from the town. Our school day began before 7:30 a.m. and ended around 5 p.m.

#### *English As A Second Language*

At first we experimented with second-language methods taught in training. In first grade English I used our tape recorder. Once the children got over the fascination of hearing their own voices, it proved to be a good tool for work on pronunciation. They couldn't hear themselves mispronounce, but when I played back the tape, they realized they weren't saying a word or phrase the same way I was.

In second grade, we might play Follow the Leader, to teach the "ing" form of the verb, i.e., "I'm walking," "I'm running," "I'm jumping," "I'm twisting." In other grades we worked on sentence patterns, intonation and rhythm exercises.

Before leaving the States, I had bought a number of children's plays, which I hoped would be useful tools in the classroom. Once a week, in both my fifth and sixth grade classes, I held a fifty-minute "drama" on the outdoor stage, choosing plays with many characters to give as many children as possible an opportunity to participate. Of course, they only walked through the play, holding the books in their hands. The children coveted their roles, and it gave me the chance to work on pronunciation, enunciation, intonation and expression. From these weekly sessions came the idea of doing a full-length play for a Christmas program.

"Ding Dong Bell" was ideal in many ways—there were many animal characters, a cat crawling around the stage who lost her tail, a frog coming out of a wishing well, a parrot flapping his wings about the stage, a donkey who he-hawed, plus a pirate's chase into a magic treasure chest, a visit to the moon with Blinky Dink, Mrs. Blinky and the Howly Wows, and Santa Claus coming in at the end of Act III to give it the Christmas touch.

I rewrote any lines that were American slang or expressions indigenous to our culture that could not be easily understood, as well as making changes when the actors had difficulties with a particular phrase or sentence. To make the project less impossible, I named my household helper, Inday Mapang, Assistant Director, to explain in Cebuano, the local dialect, when I wasn't able to express myself clearly enough to the children in English.

The children themselves were the greatest challenge, but in the final, harrowing, weeks of rehearsal, they were also my greatest strength. To see them grow, to see them develop, to see understanding in place of initial confusion, to see enthusiasm where before there was only anxiety—that made every minute worth it.

My primary goal was the intonation, with pronunciation a strong second. The children's acting ability was encouraged only for the purpose of comprehension, and I violated many theatrical tenets by having them imitate me. I may have had little professional dignity left after crawling around the stage like a cat, or kicking my heels up in the air like a donkey, but the cast and the always-interested on-lookers became much less shy of me.

#### *Teaching Science*

Can you imagine trying to teach the meaning of electricity to children who have never seen it at work?



Our purpose was to guide the teachers toward an experimental "let's see" approach to the material. I tried one way of introducing the unit on electricity. On a small table in the classroom, I placed a flashlight battery, a strip of wire and the small bulb from the flashlight, all easily available to a teacher.

"All right," I said to the class, "let's see if you can make the bulb light." For a moment the fifth graders stared at me without comprehension. Then several of the brighter students began to investigate. With the class calling out suggestions, they tried all kinds of twists and turns. I said nothing more. Twelve minutes later, one of the supposedly dull boys in the class made the bulb light. After allowing several others to perform this same marvelous feat, I asked the class to tell me, step by step, in simple language, exactly what had happened. This they were able to do, in a sense telling me the lesson. Subsequent lessons followed up the initial experiment.

One of my more hilarious contributions to science was a series of four wax balls arranged on a wire to show the earth revolving around the sun in its four seasons. My helper Inday was employed to melt the wax until it was moldable. I did this demonstration at the Guinacot school, providing my bus companions that morning with puzzled amusement as I balanced the contraption on my lap for the ride to school.

We tried doing a number of things in science — made cardboard zoos, diagrammed the flight of an airplane, produced clouds inside bottles, showed the picture of a famous movie star in a bathtub to encourage cleanliness, changed students into trees (not literally), half-climbed trees to look at leaf specimens, interrupted bees in the process of pollination to examine flowers, hunted for frogs, tested my watch with a magnet to find out if it was anti-magnetic (unfortunately, it wasn't), and dug up a tree, inadvertently showing my class how *not* to transplant a tree.

## PERSONAL LIFE

In our day-to-day living, Anabel and I were most fortunate in our neighbors and friends who accepted us as individuals, and whose lives were as interesting to us as ours were to them. Initially, our personal contacts invariably produced the same reactions: "We are very poor, you are very rich"; "You come from the greatest city in the world—this is a humble barrio"; "You eat meat every day in the States—we live on fish and rice"; "Americans are the most wonderful people in the world—we're not worth very much," and so on. But they came to realize that we respected them as much as, if not more than, many of our fellow Americans.

We lived in the barrio, it was our home, not just the place we slept at night. Although we had friends in the towns, our closest friends were our neighbors. We had made our home theirs, and slowly, they became less shy of making their homes ours. We ate with our neighbors; they ate with us. We ate their food; they ate ours, and it was the same food. We played softball, badminton and cards with our neighbors and with their children. They read our books, played with our games, gazed in rapture at the pictures we had taken of them. We harvested rice in their fields, gathered firewood, swept the road, laid cement, hammered, boloed, carried water, rode carabaos, showing our neighbors that we respected their labor.

Breathing the air of the simple life restored some of my faith in the human animal. I had never lived close to the earth before—I was born in the city and the city is inside me—but I left the Philippines questioning the superiority of the city, its machines and its progress over the man who labors with callused hands.

The States were an eon away in time and space. What was real to us was little children sitting on our floor, making imaginative things with modeling clay; or government and community development officials dropping by to respectfully ask if they could borrow our books; or our friends stopping by to chat or to curse the transportation; or reveling in the year-round sleeveless climate—that was our world, and we lived in it, if only temporarily, with relish.



## PEACE CORPS

**B**Y THE END of 1966 more than 14,000 Volunteers will be at work in Peace Corps projects in 53 countries. The growth of the Peace Corps since the time of its inception in March 1961 has resulted from continuing acceptance of the program here and abroad.

Peace Corps Volunteers represent nearly every trade and professional skill found in the United States. Approximately 50 per cent of the Volunteers abroad are engaged in elementary, secondary school and university level teaching. Other Volunteers are engaged in farm extension work, engineering, medical and health work, community development, public welfare, construction, and vocational training.

Men and women with liberal arts degrees and with science degrees are in demand by many countries. Minimum age is 18 for a Volunteer. Sound health, emotional stability, a willingness to work with other people, and initiative are all considered in the selection process. A college degree is not a requirement for all projects.

There is no Peace Corps "type." It is impossible to generalize on what a Volunteer is, because each is an individual.

Volunteers serve for two years, including three to four months of intensive training at an American college or university. They receive a living allowance to cover clothing, food, housing, medical care, transportation and incidentals. Volunteers also receive a readjustment allowance of \$1,800, figured at \$75 for each month of service.

A Peace Corps Volunteer may be deferred from Selective Service and Reserve obligations for the period of his Peace Corps service. The decision affecting the Volunteer's status is a matter for the local Selective Service Board.

Interest and principal payments on National Defense Education Act Student Loans contracted after September 22, 1961, will be suspended while the borrower is serving in the Peace Corps.

If a student is a January or June graduate, he should apply now. An underclassman who intends to graduate should submit an application in the fall of his senior year.

A number of college juniors are accepted for the special Peace Corps Advanced Training Program. These applicants begin training the summer after their junior year, then return to school in the fall to complete their senior year. They take additional Peace Corps training the summer after graduation before going abroad. A new loan program has been established for juniors who enter this program and need additional funds to tide them through the senior year of college. Up to \$600 may be obtained by juniors accepted for the training program.

To apply, simply fill out a Peace Corps application. They are available from campus liaison officers, post offices, Congressmen, and Senators, or from the Peace Corps, Washington, D.C. 20525. This is the only action required. The Peace Corps will notify applicants where and when to take the Peace Corps placement test.

The placement test is a half-hour non-competitive examination given at local post offices on the second Saturday of each month. When a person submits an application, a place in the examination is automatically reserved for him at the nearest testing location. The test is also given during Peace Corps recruiting drives on campuses.

If it is impossible for the applicant to take the test at the scheduled time, he should send the application directly to Peace Corps headquarters in Washington and make arrangements to take the test at a later time.

Volunteers will return to the United States with increased skills and a firm understanding of the emerging areas of the world.

